DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 393 086 CS 012 399

AUTHOR Agnello, Mary Frances
TITLE Post-Literacy.
PUB DATE 26 Jan 96
NOTE 12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the Southwest Educational Research Association (New Orleans, LA, January 25-27, 1996).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070) -- Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Critical Thinking; Educational History; *Educational Objectives; Higher Education; Job Skills; Labor Market; *Literacy; *Role of Education; Student Centered Curriculum; *Teacher Student Relationship; Vocational Education
IDENTIFIERS *Literacy as a Social Process; *Student Empowerment

ABSTRACT

Literacy teachers might find social theories instructive in understanding how literacy skills and job market preparation have become a literacy for control. To educate students to the best of their abilities, teachers must move beyond the unquestioned authority of the text, the canon, and the power relations that are constructed in status quo classrooms in ways suggested by postmodern literacy scholars whose ideas represent dissensions in this consideration of postmodern literacy. Paulo Freire advocates moving beyond cultural literacy or human capital literacy (worker competence) to critical literacy. Following in Freire's footsteps, C. Lankshear and P. McLaren define critical literacy as going beyond fixed meanings and claiming authority for "emancipatory" practices--they advise teachers to help their students realize that meaning is not fixed and to be literate is to undertake a dialogue with others. As a teaching method, J. Willinksy says that new literacy should consist of those strategies that shift the control of literacy from the teacher to the student. If this is true, how did the educational system manage to get so far way from where it ought to be? One answer would place the blame on educational psychology and its scientific approach. Further, for almost 100 years, the educational system has been aligning intelligence, curriculum tracks, and stratification of literacy practices according to 3 basic tenets: character formation, adherence to the canon, and regard for authority. (Contains 18 references.) (TB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED 393 086

Post-Literacy

Mary Frances Agnello
Educational Curriculum and Instruction
Texas A & M University
College Station, TX 77843-4232
409/845-8186

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL
HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
M Agnello
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)
☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

A paper presented at the Southwest Educational Research Association Annual Convention, Jan. 26, 1996, New Orleans, LA

CS012355

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Post Literacy

The *post* in post literacy specifies that this particular literacy comes after something else. In order to converse about post literacy, it is beneficial to understand what the "post-age" or "new times" implies in relation to what preceded it. Lankshear and McLaren define the terms as the transitional time frame in which we find ouselves when "in different ways and on various dimensions, the age of modernity is set against the unfolding postmodern age, the industrial social order is set against the postindustrial, the colonial and the neocolonial ages against postcolonialism, and so on. Within academic discourse, modernist and structuralist currents are set against an emergent postmodernist and post-structuralist termperament" (1993, p. 2). The educational juncture at which we find ourselves presently is one defined by reform, standards, basics, and technological know-how to keep the United States competitive in the international economy. The adherence to these new operations may be the result of relatively recent policy directives; however, it is helpful if before thinking about this more contemporary literacy, that we recognize the formal power/knowledge systems and other systems and forces formulated over the last three hundred years. Most recently, we are moving from an industrial age to the information age, and educational policy rhetoric is framed in language of *needs and problems* to be addressed so that we can make that transition.

Method

Foucault calls a discourse a complex historical development or a grid of regularities (1972). Collins (1991) captures a grid of regularities that constitutes what we regard as literacy in the following:

> Schools show in stark relief the association between symbolically valued literate traditions, mechanisms of social control, and the shape of what gets called "literacy" as a field wherein power is deployed in particular discursive practices (p. 230)

Foucault's work is important for understanding the discursive practices associated with the school and the examination, both tied to the social order prescribed by curriculum and literacy (Collins, 1991). However, perhaps more importantly for purpose of this presentation, he says that we should also examine the discursive practices that reveal the ruptures, breaks, fissures, and dissentions within a given social realm. (1972) As a general objective of this work, I wish to address how teachers who structure literacy and reading/writing instruction might learn through consideration of social theories, the ways in which literacy for skills, and job market preparation is a literacy for control. Thus, in order to educate students to the best of our and their abilities requires moving beyond the unquestioned authority of the text, the canon, and the power relations that are constructed in status quo classrooms in ways suggested by post-modern literacy scholars whose ideas represent the dissentions in this consideration of postmodern literacy.

The breaks and fissures in literacy

A seminal work in understanding literacy as something other than reading skills transmission is *Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 1970. His philosophy of education became his approach to literacy instruction in his work with educating Brazilian peasants. Freire defines literacy as conscientization that takes individuals from self-awareness to social and political action. His stance on literacy, like those of the other scholars I will cite is sociopolitical. He advocates moving beyond cultural (literary) or human capital literacy (worker competence) literacy to critical literacy. Following in Freire's footsteps, Lankshear and McLaren define critical literacy as going beyond "fixed meanings and claiming authority for 'emancipatory' practices to "make problematic the very structure and practice of representation [to focus] attention on the importance of acknowledging that meaning is not fixed and to be literate is to undertake a dialogue with others who speak from different histories, location, and experiences." (1993, p. 49) The implication for teachers in this instance is it is not in the best interest of students to instill only classroom literacy that will translate into worker compliance and consumer conformity into students without allowing them to speak to and from their life experiences.

Willinsky has referred to New Literacy as using a whole language approach to language-learning through writing in the classroom. He basically says that literacy derives meaning and force from the means through which it is taught, as well as from the ends to which it is put. His work *New Literacy*, 1990 advocates "new institutional goals for the schools, new professional goals for teaching, and new educational goals for literacy" (p. 8). As a teaching method, Willinsky says that "the New Literacy

consists of those strategies in the teaching of reading and writing which attempt to shift the control of literacy from the teacher to the student; literacy is promoted in such programs as a social process with language that can from the very beginning extend the students' range of meaning and connection" (p. 8).

The assumptions made by Freire, McLaren, and Willinsky seem commonsensical. How is it that reading and writing and literacy practices in schools have not accomplished what seem to be simple objectives of allowing the literacy process to begin with the life and circumstance of the student, to teach so that reading and writing make good sense through the ways that they are used? How did we go so far afield from where it seems that good practical literacy ought to be? There is not a simple answer to this question because so many variables are involved. However, a short answer to this query is that there has been an attempt to make reading and writing instruction into a science. The area of education that promotes itself as most scientific is educational psychology. Over the years, the marriage of reading to educational psychology has produced negative results that we are cognizant of, and yet we cannot divorce ourselves of this marriage because of the fear that in so doing we become unscientific in our approach to teaching. Luke says that for almost a hundred years, we have been aligning intelligence, curriculum tracks, and stratification of literacy practices that have adhered to three basic tenets 1) character formation, 2) adherence to the Canon, and 3) regard for the text as authority. Luke suggests that although reading has been framed in terms of "culturally neutral, universal skills, reading has been used in literate cultures" to form or shape particular kinds of moral and social identities. The canon becomes part of the process because it becomes the vehicle of

literacy, as well as the subject of reading and writing. Ultimately, the relationship between text and the reader help to establish the relationship of power and knowledge. (1995, p. 101-102; Foucault, 1977) How did our social structures evolve to such a state?

The social construction of literacy

Cook Gumperz in *The Social Construction of Literacy* (1986) elaborates on two contemporaneous literacy movements in the nineteenth century. One was the move to public schooling to establish a literacy for control and to educate the unskilled to work in the factories. In oppositon to this movement was a "popular, literate culture of ordinary people, often considered radical, [that] defined literacy and the achievement of schooling as part of their individual and personal development" (p. 29). Several effects of the state controlled literacy to be accomplished through schooling are that schooling cancelled oral and pluralistic literate traditions, 2) literacy became tied personal, social, economic advancement, 3) literacy skills became linked to goodness, to form what Goody and Watt call the moral economy so that 4) "...individual effort, economic success, and the advancement of literacy through schooling and the advancement of literacy through schooling were necessarily related" (Cook Gumperz, p. 32).

Thus the social construction of literacy as a social virtue was accomplished and a grid of regularities was established. (Foucault, 1972) People began to gaze on illiteracy as problematic because it was immoral, socially unacceptable, and usually was associated with failure and poverty. The science of the political state and the science of psychological testing

drove literacy and curricular practices, and whenever necessary (as deemed so by policy makers) recommend more testing, more schooling, more basics, and more competencies as potential policy treatments for the illiteracy problem. (Scheurich, 1995) Until anthropological and sociolinguistic research methods implicated the educational problems of learning language and school achievement, language education research focused either on macroinstitutional issues or on psychometric evalutations of teacher-student relations. (Cook Gumperz, p. vii) The kinds of research questions asked in these contexts could elicit numerical (and therefore measureable) results to determine if teaching practices were effective. The movement to such assessment stems back to what Luke says was an epoque and a technique that thanks to behavioral psychologists (Huey, Thorndike, Gray, Gates, and others) built psychological models of reading that fit "industrial-era U.S. educational policy" (p. 96). He contends that "[t]he residual traditions of those models--the construction of reading as behavior, skill, and, now information processing still form the heart of current reading instruction, both in schools and in adult programs. In its short, 100-year history as a focus of psychological research and curricular development, reading has been redesigned substantially: from a means of communication with divinity and a means for moral development, to reading as behavioral skills, to reading as deep linguistic processing and "a psycholinguistic guessing game," to reading as vocational competence"(96).

The reason that knowledge of this evolution is important for literacy teachers is that "[i]mplicit in ways of teaching reading are social theories--models of the social order, social power, and social change; models of the institutional everyday life; models of worker/employee relations; and ultimately models of how the literate worker and citizen should look and

be" (p. 97). Unless we give much thought to such ideas, we do not realize that we are teaching ideology through what and how we teach, as well as through what and how we do not teach. Perhaps, it is important to link literacy and the curriculum in ways that we had not before considered: "...Curriculum is a most important site of literacy formation [because] curriculum includes all areas and subjects of formal school learning and the connections (or lack or connection) between them" (Lankshear, p. 155).

Bronwyn Davies in *Shards of Glass* (1994), Carole Edelsky in *With Literacy and Justice for All* (1993), Erica McWilliam in *Broken Images* (1995) suggest that we rethink the forms of domination as advocates of postmodern democratic schooling practices. Davies says that we need to rethink the stories, narratives, hero-rather-than-heroine-oriented tales that we teach children so early in their lives. Edelsky says that in teaching reading skills that we are actually teaching "not reading" and that the post-modern needs of people require more critical approaches to learning to read the word and the world. McWilliam through a feminist lens looks at teacher education research that heretofore is broken down into dichotomies of traditional and conservative versus contemporary and radical/critical discourses. She says that we must not fall into the same trap because such dialog does not further the transformation of people or institutional structures. We need to address what is specifically going on in classrooms through reflective practice to discern what is liberatory and what is constraining about educational practices. Important for reading teachers interested in classroom and social transformation is the understanding that any approach can be institutionalized and so the elusive best practice may forever be just beyond our grasp. However, it is

not through attrition that good teaching and learning occur; but rather, it is within an affirmed and directed approach that teachers can question the dominant discourse of testing and competence literacy, the authority of text, and the canon of knowledge that explains power relations.

As Luke suggests, we do not have to wait until some later date to teach critical reading instruction. Mitchell and Weiler call for the necessity to rewrite literacy based on narrow interpretations that have controlled literacy, thus marginalizing many voices from a social dialog. New conceptualizations can accompany the earliest stages of literacy instruction and are called for by Luke, particularly in ESL and adult literacy classes. He says that we, in light of the needs of New Times, might look at the emergent demand for workers with technical and information processing skills. There are advantages and disadvantages for students whom we train to be workers. "For each documented instance of new forms of productive diversity, new forms of exploitation, of exclusion, of marginalization, have also emerged" (Luke citing Hall, 1991, p. 113). As Kincheloe has recommended, in *Toil and Trouble: Good Work, Smart Workers, and the Integration of Academic and Vocational Education* (1995), all students who will be future workers deserve to be recognized for their contributions, all have something to offer, and all can be successful in school if outdated schooling practices are abandoned. In conclusion, I will cite Luke who sums up post-literacy as a good opportunity. He says, "The opportunity we have is to construct and develop a reading instruction that foregrounds ways of working with, talking about and talking back to, and second-guessing texts. In the larger context of work-place reform and social justice, a critical social literacy that values critique, analysis, innovation, and appraisals for action may be

of social, economic, and political benefit for the community, for the individual, and ultimately for the nation." (1995, p. 113).

References

Au, K.H. (1995). Critical issues: Multicultural perspectives on literacy research. *A Journal of Literacy*, 27(1), 85-101.

Burchell, G., Gordon, C., and Miller, P. (Eds.). (1991). *The Foucault effect: Studies in governmentality*. Chicago: The Univerisy of Chicago.

Cook-Gumperz, J. (Ed.). (1986). *The social construction of literacy*. New York: cambridge University Press.

Davies, B. (1993). *Shards of glass: Children reading and writing beyond gendered identities*. Cresskill, New Jersey: Hampton Press, Inc.

Edelsky, C. (1991). *With literacy and justice for all: Rethinking the social in language and education*. New York: The Falmer Press.

Ellsworth, N., Hedley, C., and Baratta, A. (1994). *Literacy: A redefinition*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Foucault, M. (1972). *The archaeology of knowledge and the discourse on language*. New York: Harper Torchbooks.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. New York: Seabury Press.

Green, B. (Ed.). *The insistence of the letter: Literacy studies and curriculum theorizing*. Pennsylvania: University of Pittsburgh Press.

Kincheloe, J. (1995). *Toil and trouble: Good work, smart workers, and the integration of academic and vocational education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Lankshear, C. (1993). Curriculum as literacy: Reading and writing in "New Times' in Bill Green (Ed.). *The insistence of the letter: Literacy studies and curriculum theorizing*, 154-174.

Lankshear, C. and McLaren, P. (Eds.). (1993). *Critical literacy: Politics, praxis, and the postmodern.* State University of New York Press.

Luke, A. (1995). When basic skills and information processing just aren't enough: Rethinking reading in New Times. *Teachers College Record*j, 97(1), 95-115.

McLaren, P. and Lankshear, C. (Eds.). (1994). *Politics of liberation: Paths from Freire.* New York: Routledge.

McWilliam, E. (1995). *In broken images: Feminist tales for a different teacher education.* New York: Teachers College Press.

Mitchell, C. and Weiler, K. (1991). *Rewriting literacy: Culture and the discourse of the other.* New York: Bergin and Garvey.

Scheurich, J.J. (1994). Policy archaeology: A new policy studies methodology. *Journal of Educational Policy*, 9(4), 297-316.

Willinsky, J. (1990). *The new literacy: Redefining reading and writing in the schools.* New York: Routledge.